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ALBERTA ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS 2006-2007

making a difference

Alberta



minister's message

"Alberta Environment has a critical role in advising and establishing policy for the government of Alberta on how we are going to protect the environment, how we are going to ensure that we have sustainable development now and into the future."

HONOURABLE ROB RENNER

As the Minister of Environment, it is my pleasure to reflect on the significant milestones of 2006-07 that reinforce Alberta Environment's position as a leader in environmental protection. This *Highlights* booklet presents a snapshot of some of the Ministry's accomplishments.

In 2006-2007, Alberta Environment reaffirmed its leadership role on climate change, with the ***Climate Change and Emissions Management Act***, requiring companies that emit more than 100,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases a year to reduce their emissions intensity by 12 per cent starting July 1, 2007. This is the next step in implementing Alberta's Climate Change Action Plan, and further solidifies our national reputation for responding to climate change.

Alberta Environment once again demonstrated its commitment to addressing water issues. Approval of the **South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan** in the summer of 2006

as well as the **Athabasca River Water Management Framework** in March 2007 ensure Alberta's water supply is appropriately managed and protected. The **Baseline Water-Well Testing for Coalbed Methane Operations** standard, which came into effect May 2006, ensures Albertans will continue to have access to clean and safe drinking water, a staple of Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy.

Alberta Environment takes pride in its leadership role and recognizes that making a difference in our province and on our environment is a shared responsibility. Working together, we will continue to move Alberta to the forefront of environmental protection and ensure the continued prosperity of our province.

Honourable Rob Renner
Minister of Environment



who we are

Alberta Environment oversees policies and initiatives associated with air quality, water management, waste management, land use and climate change. We manage the provincial environmental review process and coordinate public education on conservation and environmental protection. We are also responsible for environmental monitoring and compliance programs to enforce Alberta's environmental legislation and regulations.

In January 2007, our department was reorganized into four main business divisions – Environmental Assurance, Environmental Management, Environmental Stewardship, and Oil Sands Environmental Management, all supported by Ministry Support Services.

Environmental Assurance

Environmental Assurance is focused on policy development, information management, and monitoring and reporting to assess assurance of environmental outcomes.

Environmental Management

Environmental Management develops place-based environment and resource management outcomes, stewards cumulative effects management systems and delivers on the Ministry's regulatory mandate within these systems. The division is also responsible for operation and maintenance of provincially-owned water management infrastructure, dam safety, flow forecasting, and river engineering.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental Stewardship develops major environmental strategies, stewards the relationship and capacity building efforts required to be successful with our partners, and leads our efforts on conservation, education and outreach.

Oil Sands Environmental Management

Oil Sands Environmental Management develops place-based environment and resource management policies with a focus on oil sands development and northeastern Alberta.



taking action on climate change

Climate change is now discussed in just about every household and school, but this wasn't always the case. Public concern about climate change hardly registered in the early 90s. But even then, Alberta was discussing the impact of climate change.

In the mid 90s, the Government of Alberta asked the Clean Air Strategic Alliance for recommendations on how to deal with climate change. By 1998, the Alberta government convened a roundtable with experts from around the world to discuss climate change. Our commitment to moving on climate change resulted in the release of Canada's first climate change action plan in 2002, *Albertans and Climate Change: Taking Action*. In 2003, we were the first in Canada to pass climate change legislation with the *Climate Change and Emissions Management Act*. In 2004, we were the first province in Canada to require mandatory reporting of greenhouse gases by large industrial emitters. In 2007, Alberta accomplished another national first. Our province became the first jurisdiction to require large industrial emitters to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions intensity.



> Climate change is a global issue, one in which we all share responsibility. In 2006-2007, we introduced the *Climate Change and Emissions Management Act*, making Alberta the first province in Canada to pass legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions intensity from large industrial emitters. Under the *Specified Gas Emitters Regulation*, facilities emitting more than 100,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas must reduce their emissions intensity by 12 per cent starting July 1, 2007.

> We continue to provide support for Climate Change Central to educate and engage Albertans and industry on energy efficiency.


While opinions about its impact and solutions vary, one thing is certain – climate change is a complex issue. Our Climate Change Action Plan set the stage in 2002. The *Climate Change and Emissions Management Act* fulfills the commitments laid out in this plan.



preserving our water

Every spring millions of ducks return to Alberta ponds to nest and breed. In order to make the long trip north to Alberta, ducks fly in a reverse “v” formation to conserve energy by reducing wind resistance. The birds take turns being in the front, falling back when they get tired. Their flight home would not be possible without forming this working partnership within their flock.

Alberta Environment also recognizes the benefits of working in partnerships to protect our land, air and water. For example, last year Alberta Environment supported eight Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils as they began to develop water management plans for the Battle, Beaver, Bow, Lesser Slave, Milk, North Saskatchewan, Oldman, and Red Deer river basins. The plans, to be complete by 2010, will provide a long-term vision for water supply in local areas and seek to balance environmental protection and economic development.

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- > In August 2006, the Government of Alberta approved the South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan, which closes the Oldman, Bow, and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins to new water license applications. This is a momentous and long-term action to manage southern Alberta's water supply. It safeguards existing water users' supply while protecting the aquatic environment, and encourages Albertans to become more efficient in their water use.
 - > With the Athabasca Water Management Framework, released in March 2007, Alberta Environment, together with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, is protecting the ecological integrity of the Lower Athabasca River. The framework promotes more efficient water use by putting a strict weekly cap on how much water oil sands companies can remove.
 - > In addition to the eight already operating, four new Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils were formed in 2006 – the Battle River Watershed Alliance, Beaver River Watershed Alliance, the Lesser Slave Lake Watershed Council, and the Milk River Watershed Council Canada – to ensure specific water issues within the watershed are addressed.
 - > We continue to drive the implementation of our world-renowned *Water for Life* strategy, and at the same time we are stepping back to assess whether changes must be made to meet our changing environment and needs. The Alberta Water Council will be reviewing the province's water management policy for moving water between rivers in the same major basin on behalf of Alberta Environment. We expect the Council's recommendations in fall 2007.
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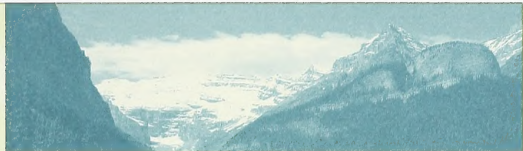
The future direction of water management in Alberta requires us to continue to respond effectively to new pressures.



protecting our air

Last year, Alberta Environment received more than 15,400 calls. Our staff look into every call and respond to events with the potential to significantly and adversely impact Alberta's environment. In environmental emergencies, the Alberta Support and Environmental Response Team is called to hit the ground quickly, providing an immediate and coordinated response.

On January 23, 2007, Alberta Environment's hotline operator received a call from Suncor's Millenium oilsands project reporting a fire had broken out in the vacuum recovery unit. The incident response was centrally managed by the Alberta Support and Environmental Response Team. Alberta Environment provided regional onsite response, access to real-time air monitoring data, and local, department and media briefings. Department staff throughout the province worked together to provide timely and accurate information to protect the health of people in the area and the state of the environment.



> Change is constant. Alberta Environment continues to adapt to meet the unique challenges of each region in our province. In 2006-2007, three more airshed zones were established in Alberta: Calgary Regional Airshed Zone, the Capital Airshed Alliance, and the Alberta Central Airshed Society. These are in addition to the seven already established. Alberta's airsheds bring local stakeholders together to make decisions on the specific issues facing their region.

> As a result of our continued support of and partnership with the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, airshed partnerships in the Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer areas are proactively developing management plans to ensure air quality levels exceed Canada-wide standards.

> Through the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, Alberta Environment developed a Canada-wide standard for mercury from coal fired electrical generation plants.

Alberta has seven airshed zones across the province. These airsheds and Alberta Environment operate over 40 air monitoring stations across the province, which record continuous air quality data on an hourly basis.



protecting our land

Albertans love to be plugged in. Most households have at least one television and almost three-quarters have computer equipment. This number caught the attention of a team in the Pollution Prevention and Conservation Section of Alberta Environment. They were concerned about the environmental impact of disposing of old computers, TVs and other electronics. These products contain varying amounts of lead, mercury and cadmium, which may pose an environmental and health risk if not properly managed.

The team worked with stakeholders to develop Canada's first electronics recycling program. In 2006, the program kept more than 340,000 pieces of old electronic equipment out of Alberta's landfills. Instead, these pieces are being recycled to make plumbing supplies, flower pots and new computer parts. The section had previously developed similar regulated stewardship programs for scrap tires, used oil materials and beverage containers. The team's work on all these programs earned them an Emerald Award nomination in February.



- > Together with our six cross-ministry partners, Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, Municipal Affairs and Housing, International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, Alberta Agriculture and Food, and Seniors and Community Supports, we continue to work on the Land-use Framework. This framework looks at how communities in rural and urban centres grow, and addresses how, in light of Alberta's growth, municipalities can use and manage land appropriately.
- > We also continue to focus on long-term strategies for waste reduction that will divert waste from Alberta's landfills, specifically a provincial paint stewardship program and a construction and demolition waste initiative.
- > To ensure the Government of Alberta continues to model best practices, we initiated the development of the Pollution and Resource Conservation Policy to develop government waste reduction and green procurement policies.

Our role includes helping Albertans make informed decisions. We work with schools, industry, municipalities, and other governments to ensure people make the best possible choices to maintain the health of Alberta's environment.



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A full version of the
2006-07 Annual Report
can be found on Alberta
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www.environment.alberta.ca

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Lac La Biche
Lethbridge
Medicine Hat
Oldman River Dam
Peace River
Rocky Mountain House
St. Mary Dam
Stony Plain
Swan Hills
Vulcan
Wainwright